10: Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5)1937 Pukapukans

EMOTIONAL RELEASE IN A POLYNESIAN COMMUNITY

By ERNEST BEAGLEHOLE
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NEW ZEALAND

105 THE atoll of Pukapuka consists of three small islets strung on a coral ring. Apart from the tiny islet of Nassau, the nearest neighbor of Pukapuka is the Samoan Islands, some four hundred miles to the south. The total land area of the atoll [161] is less than one square mile. The population today numbers about five hundred people. In the past it was probably two or three times this number. For the most part, owing to the necessity of conserving food resources, all the people live on a small part of one islet only. The remainder of this islet and the other two islets are kept as food reserves visited only at times set by the controlling villages. The people are grouped into three villages, membership in which is by birth or by affiliation after birth.[1]

The year is roughly divided into two seasons. A season of fair weather with steady, cool, southeast trade winds lasts from March to November. From November on, the weather is marked by changeable and boisterous gales from the northwest. The average height of the land above sea level is about six feet. Hurricanes are infrequent, but when they do occur their effect is disastrous. Even without a hurricane, the time from November to March is one of ever-present anxiety and worry as to what the next day will bring forth. Since deep-sea fishing is difficult, this period is often marked by scarcity of both fish and plant foods.

105 The culture of the people is on the whole characterized by [152] extraverted tendencies. Times of birth, marriage and death are 156 punctuated with violent outbursts of emotion that is allowed full 181 expression in chanting, dancing and wailing. In individual behavior the society sets a premium on vigorous action whether in love, sport or everyday life. That man, or woman, is honored who shows exceptional excellence in any of these activities. The ideal is competitive to a degree. A man is happy if he can 156 outstrip his fellows in love or sport and then boast of his exploits 578 in songs that he delights to chant. Naturally, for one to succeed,

[1] The social and economic organization of Pukapuka is described in *Formal Patterns of Pukapukan Culture*, by Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole, Bulletin in press, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii. [See 1: Beaglehole and Beaglehole-analyst]